DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 434 075 SO 031 169

AUTHOR Palmer-Moloney, Jean
TITLE Questions of Voice, Issues of Knowledge: District Level Responses to the Colorado State Model Content Standards in Geography.
PUB DATE 1999-04-00
NOTE 37p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Montreal, Quebec, Canada, April 19-23, 1999).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Standards; Educational Change; Educational Research; Elementary Secondary Education; *Geography; Local Issues; *Public Schools; *School Districts; *State Standards
IDENTIFIERS *Colorado; Educational Issues; *Goals 2000

ABSTRACT

This paper addresses state and local level issues linked with Goals 2000 in Colorado and seeks to shed light on the development of geography content standards in one Colorado school district. The paper begins with a succinct review of Colorado's standards-based educational reform and the creation of the state's model content standards. After a summary of the qualitative methodology used in the study, the paper focuses on the impact and implementation of the geography content standards in one of Colorado's 176 school districts. The paper concludes with thematic generalizations regarding content standards and standards-based education. Contains 17 references. (BT)

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by Jean Palmer-Moloney

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Questions of Voice, Issues of Knowledge: District Level Responses to the Colorado State Model Content Standards in Geography

By the Tenth Amendment of the Constitution of the United States, "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people." Since education is not mentioned in the body of the Constitution, this amendment has been interpreted as leaving to the states the complete control of their schools. (Educational Policies Commission 1938, 103)

The National Education Goals, created in 1990 by the National Governors' Association, were birthed in the political arena. Signed into law in March 1994, P.L. 103-22--Goals 2000: Educate America Act, became many things to many people. To their proponents, the Goals became blocks to shore up the country's education system. To their opponents, the Goals became blocks to prevent local control of education.

From inception, the Goals 2000 and their associated panacea, standards-based education reform, have been far-reaching and have impacted education in many ways at many levels. Yet, *the* solution for *all* of the nation's students has remained elusive, and as the turn of the century approaches, educators in the US continue to debate what students should know and be able to do, who should decide, and why.

The purpose of this paper is to address state and local level issues linked with Goals 2000 in Colorado and to shed light on the development of geography content standards in one Colorado school district. The paper begins with a succinct review of Colorado's standards-based educational reform and the creation of the state's model content standards. Then, after a summary of the qualitative methodology used in the study, the focus of the paper turns to the impact and implementation of the geography content standards in one of Colorado's 176 school districts. Thematic generalizations

regarding geography content standards and standards-based education conclude this district level case study.

Creating Colorado's Model Content Standards

> ...[As chairman of the National Council on Education Standards and Testing] I anticipated the fight over standards to be one of federalism, and, at the state level, what was state and what was local. Such a strong tradition exists in the United States of local control of schools that I wanted to defang that argument so that discussions could be held on Theodore R. Sizer's question, "Who is the 'we' here?" (Roy Romer, Governor of Colorado, 1995, 66)

As the attention of the nation turned toward issues of the national Goals and standards-based reform, the State of Colorado actively solicited the assistance of its citizens in the evaluation of the state's proposed K-12 subject area content standards. Knowledge from identified academic area experts in mathematics, science, history, reading and writing, and geography was used to generate concise, written statements (a.k.a. content standards) regarding what all students should know. A draft document for each academic area was published listing six exemplary or "model" content standards. Relevant benchmarks (a.k.a. performance standards) were included in each document as indicators of what all students should be able to do at grades 4, 8, and 12 to prove their knowledge of each content standard.

Once the content and performance standards were determined and agreed upon by state level content standards writing committees, draft documents were circulated for public comment. Over 3,000 copies of the first draft of the model content standards were sent out to "groups of individuals such as parent organizations, teachers, superintendents, public libraries, presidents of school boards, college and university presidents, and the general public" (Houghton 1996, 7). Each document went through at least three

iterations, and each included response forms that asked citizens to rate each of the six standards on a scale of 1-5 according to five questions:

1. Is the content standard a statement of what a student should know or be able to do?
2. Is the content standard specific and clear?
3. Is the content standard meaningful for today's world?
4. Is the content standard inclusive (that is, something every child can learn)?
5. Is the content standard a worthy goal for student learning?

According to one report of the findings, between 700 and 1300 responses were received in each subject area, and Colorado was recognized with federal-level accolades for its high degree of citizen involvement in the standards writing process (NEGP 1996, 6). When commenting on his state's successful standards work, Governor Roy Romer claimed that when talking about the need for educational change and improvement in Colorado, the "we" being discussed was consistently defined as the "people of America" (1995, 66). He further stated that in Colorado, in order to use "top-down" opportunities for "bottom-up," grassroots change, standards were created in a collaborative manner. Romer's indicated that the recipe for collaboration was "a continuous process:"

> (1) Don't start from scratch. Use the best thinking there is and bring it in for a content base.
> (2) Put it [the content base] together with the people in the school districts.
> (3) Circulate the ideas and drafts of standards and get reactions.
> (4) Go back and work on them some more.
> (5) Bring it out, take it back, and bring it out again.
> (1995, 67).

In "National Standards as Starting Points," Romer wrote that in Colorado, the standards were never viewed as reform from the top down. The Colorado content standards represented "what Coloradans thought students should be learning in school...We took two years to write the state [model] standards and went through five drafts [in each subject area] that thousands of citizens helped to review and revise" (1996,

40). Romer attributed the success of standards-based reform in Colorado to the fact that Colorado held public meetings and met with people to discuss standards.

Beyond Governor Romer's grassroots campaign, other coordinated, state level efforts kept the standards at the forefront of Colorado's educational thought. These efforts included: (1) building alliances with pro-standards groups, such as the New Standards Project; (2) gaining recognition as one of first of the 49 states to develop state standards for student learning; and (3) collaborating with the National Governors' Association to reaffirm the state's political and corporate commitment to standards-based reform.

Within the state's professional education community, the Colorado Education Association (CEA), an affiliate of the National Education Association, supported Goals 2000 and standards-based education in Colorado. In the article, "The Refresher Course on Standards," the CEA presented the following information to its members:

> Academic content standards are entirely objective. Because content standards simply spell out expectations of what students should know and be able to do, they are education-system neutral. Any philosophy, curriculum, teacher training program, or class scheduling system is acceptable as long as it can demonstrate progress in bringing students up to standards...At heart, standards-based education is a simple, four-step idea:
>
> 1. You get the people of your state and community to agree on expectations of what students should know and be able to do at each level of their education.
> 2. You align your curriculum, teaching methods, class schedules—whatever it takes—to bring your students up to these standards.
> 3. You carry on ongoing assessments at both the state and local levels to determine your students progress toward these standards.
> 4. You use the results of the assessments to make adjustments to your education system until you are making satisfactory progress toward the standards.
>
> Colorado's model content standards were not conjured up by a team of distant experts. Rather, they were developed by the educators and community members of our state, by means of a two-year process involving three publicly reviewed

> drafts, some 10,000 responses to these drafts, and regional meetings across the state. As such, the standards represent a consensus of thousands of parents, educators, administrators, business people, and interested community members. (1997, 11)

Regardless of CEA's assurances that standards-based education made sense and would lead to better education for all students, some questions did arise. Did "all" really mean *all students*? Who defined the knowledge base embodied in the standards? Who determined the significance of this knowledge base? From where did the funding come to accomplish successfully the four steps described by CEA? Were school districts and their teachers expected to *align*, *implement*, and *assess* the standards simultaneously?

In his essay "Explaining Standards to the Public," Governor Romer addressed the issue of getting states and districts to adopt model content standards:

> I am struggling very hard in Colorado to say to people, "This is ours; this is yours; education reform has got to come from you from the bottom up. But it is crazy for you to start from scratch. You ought to look at the best thinking in the country, and that is what we are trying to bring to you. It is crazy for you to start from scratch in each district; we ought to bring to you the best thinking in Colorado.
> (Romer 1995, 69)

As noted by O.L. Davis in his editorial "Beyond 'Best Practices' Toward Wise Practices," asking for and using only the "best" is an American penchant (1997, 1). Romer's call for using the "best thinking" adds another to Davis' litany of "bests" in American education—best curricula, best teaching methods, best supervision, and best practices. Being christened "best," however, did not mean that even the best thought-out standards would fit all school settings, all pupils and teachers, and all school offerings in the state.

According to the State of Colorado Standards-Based Education Act (H.B. 93-1313), every school district in Colorado was charged to develop clear and measurable standards for student performance in the defined core academic subject areas by January

1997. At the state level, model content standards for each subject area had been developed to ensure a reliable level of educational quality. According to the law, each school district could decide to adopt the state's model standards or to develop its own to meet or exceeded the state model standards. Whichever course of action taken, a district's standards needed to clearly state what students should know and be able to do. This local-level process of developing content standards was supposed to be an unprecedented opportunity for communities across the state to participate in defining what was important in education.

The passage of H. B. 93-1313, therefore, meant that each of the 176 school districts in Colorado received the mandate to "meet or beat" the state model content standards. Soaring Peaks School District, the location of this case study, was expected to acknowledge, endorse, and act on the new legislation.

Educational Connoisseurship and Criticism: Ways of Seeing and Knowing

Based on the work of Elliot Eisner, the qualitative method of educational connoisseurship and criticism drove this study. Educational connoisseurship is the act of knowledgeable perception. To be a connoisseur is to know how to look, to see, and to appreciate; it is the art of appreciation and is a private act (Eisner 1985, 219). To be an educational connoisseur is to be able to make fine-grained discriminations among complex and subtle qualities. As an educational connoisseur, the researcher needs to have a knowledge of and experience with the situation—i.e., the particular classroom, teacher, school system, school district, and extended learning community—to be able to distinguish the significant from the insignificant and to interpret what was noticed (Eisner 1991, 66).

Educational criticism, on the other hand, is the description of action and meaning in data collection; it is interpretation and reflection on a specific situation found in the field. It includes thematic generalizations, not broad, quantitative-type generalizations. Its function is to expand awareness of educational events and objects so that they are more fully appreciated (Eisner 1991, 237).

To critique the school district under study, I collected and reviewed relevant archival documents and local Board of Education minutes obtained from the administrative offices. With the approval of the superintendent, records were open for my perusal, and I was able to scrutinize district level information pertinent to standards-based education. A copy of the district's new geography curriculum was made available to me, along with the district's published social studies curriculum units and lesson guides.

Following the lead of Seidman (1991), I conducted interviews with parents (both White and Latino) and with school district administrators to better understand the district and its broader learning community. In addition to reviewing written material and conducting interviews, and I attended several district meetings, district-wide functions, and Board of Education meetings. I attended the district's science fair and reviewed student entries in the district's History Day competition. In addition, I made a point to visit all of the middle and high schools in the district to gain a more holistic understanding of what it meant to go to and to work in the area's schools. All of these experiences plus the document analyses helped me to gain a comprehensive understanding of the school district and to interpret my field observations. As Van Maanen stated (1988,3), a culture is expressed only by the actions and words of its members and must be interpreted by, not given to, a fieldworker.

The method of educational connoisseurship and criticism was particularly advantageous for this research, for it allowed and expected me to use my expertise as a connoisseur and critic of geography and of education. As noted by Eisner, criticism "can only be as rich as the critic's perceptions" (1991, 237). I lived and worked in Colorado's Ski Country for 16 years. For 11 of those years I was a high school geography teacher in one of Colorado's mountain counties, and I gained first hand experience with many of the pros and cons of the educational process in Colorado's "resort districts." In addition to teaching full-time, I served on a plethora of building and district level school committees. Thanks to the opportunities I had as a public school educator, I obtained an awareness of the subtle political and economic "ins" and "outs" of school decision-making in Colorado.

Having earned a Master's Degree in cultural geography plus 30 hours of doctoral coursework in human/political geography, I have a solid content knowledge of the subject matter. In 1993-94 I led the geography content standards writing team for my school district. I served as a teacher consultant for the Colorado Geographic Alliance (COGA), participated as a presenter at a number of COGA workshops, and conducted a number of school district in-service activities on teaching geography. Coursework and fieldwork related to my B.A. degree in anthropology (University of New Orleans) and my M.A. degree in historical/cultural geography (Louisiana State University) provided a strong background in culture and field studies for this study.

I am a Latin Americanist geographer, who did her time "in the field" living in Guatemala and Honduras. I read and speak Spanish with enough fluency to communicate effectively with the Spanish speakers I interviewed.

Organization

At its most basic level, this case study is about the culture of a school district. It represents a diverse community of people responding to one event at one point in time. The culture of the school district, expressed through the voices in its community of learners, directed the descriptions used in the following narrative. To analyze the different voices heard in the community of learners, I use the metaphor of a musical score. First, I juxtapose the state's ideal composition with the district's extant score. Next, I review the different community voices as parts written in the district's score. After reviewing the district's decisions and actions regarding the geography content standards, I present a review of district's variations on the theme of standards and curriculum. I conclude with the song's coda and end by returning to issues of voice in the community.

Reviewing the Score, Deciding to Sing

[N.B.: In order to protect the school district and members of its learning community, pseudonyms are used in this writing.]

Soaring Peaks School District, the only school district in Soaring Peaks County, lies in the heart of Colorado's ski country. In accordance with Colorado's standards-base reform mandate, the district was to adopt content standards that represented a "bottom-up" reform effort driven by community input. Ideally, all voices in the community were to be represented in the process. Determining Soaring Peaks' community members proved to be a challenge, however, because the county's demographics were continuously changing. School district data confirmed an 8% growth rate every year for four years, from 1992-1996 (interview with Dr. Richards, Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Staff Development, May 20, 1997). Though the entire learning

community was to be involved in Soaring Peaks' education reform effort and all voices in the community were to be invited to sing, an analysis of the musical score revealed that the different vocal parts were not written in unison. Because of this, the distinct vocal parts varied in significance.

The **soprano** part (the shrill melody line) was sung by the White, Euro-Americas representing the dominant culture group. This group controlled most of the money in the school district and had the most direct ties to the county's world-class ski resort. School district officials noted that many of the White, Euro-Americans had moved recently to Soaring Peaks County from California. Other new county residents singing this part had migrated uphill from Colorado's Front Range urban sprawl—from Ft. Collins south along the foothills to Denver, Colorado Springs, and Pueblo. Fleeing "urban blight" (a.k.a. poverty, racial violence, gangs, environmental degradation, and crowds) these newcomers moved to the high country in search of peaceful, "untouched" areas to raise their families and/or conduct business. They came to the mountains with their money, their mini vans, and their determination to live in communities that may have existed only in the TV fantasies of *Leave it to Beaver* and *Hazel*.

The **bass** part (the underlying, rhythmic beat) was sung by the long-term Latino residents in the district. Latino settlers have been moving into Colorado from the time an extension of the Santa Fe Trail found its way north into the San Luis Valley (Meinig 1971, 89). From the late 1800s to the mid-1980s, one Latino family after another joined relatives living in Colorado's mining districts, and the Latino communities in these areas grew. Many of these mountainous mining areas would become part of Colorado's ski country (Jones 1996, 9).

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the ski industry in Colorado was just beginning, the "white gold" of snow was becoming more important and more cost effective to mine than the yellow ore of gold. When hard-rock mining went bust in most of the state circa the mid-1980s, many Latino miners traded in their hard-hats and headlamps for bus tubs, dish towels, and back hoes and took lower-skilled jobs needed to support the state's growing tourist and ski-related industries (Jones 1996).

In Soaring Peaks District, many long-term, local Latinos were bicultural (Latino-American) but not bilingual (Spanish/English). Their interests and concerns were not as easy to hear as those representing the area's dominant culture group, but because of their long standing in the community, their presence was felt even if their voices were muted.

The **alto** and **baritone** parts (the harmony and counter-rhythm) were sung by the county's newly arrived Latinos. Many of these relatively poor newcomers arrived seeking work in the local service sector (Reuter 1997, 1). As Lisa Jones points out in her ***High Country News*** article "El Nuevo West: Tourism needs workers, Mexicans need jobs...Mexicans take on the West's work..." (1996 1, 6-11), in five Colorado ski counties 6,000 tourism jobs reportedly went unfilled in 1994. Soaring Peaks County has had a growing number of Latino families, both legal and illegal, who moved to the area looking for work associated with Misty Mountain Ski Resort. As a result, the county has had a growing number of newly arrived Latino students attending its public schools. Most of these newcomers have been Spanish-speaking with varying degrees of English language proficiency.

Out of Tune, Out of Rhyme

According to one Soaring Peaks teacher who was a twenty-year secondary school veteran in the district, "The Hispanic community in Soaring Peaks County has had generations of unmet educational need due to poverty, lower expectations, lower focus on academics, and the language barrier. It's just getting worse." At the time of this study, the Latino community, as a whole, had a high level of need, which can be inferred by an analysis of the following points:

1. Wealth was distributed unevenly. Many Latino families in the county were living at or below the poverty line, and approximately 25% of the students who attended Soaring Peaks schools were on the Free or Reduced Lunch Program (Dr. Richards, personal communication, October 8, 1996). Yet the average per capita income in 1996 was estimated to be $27,416 (personal communication, State Demographer's Office, Richard Len, April 28, 1997) and the average single family dwelling sold for $547,974 in 1996 (Best 1997, 11).

2. The cost of housing in Colorado's Ski Country was many times higher than in Denver or other Front Range cities. Thanks to the ubiquitous trailer courts in Soaring Peaks County, "many of the Latino workers had affordable housing, if 12-15 lived together and split the costs" (personal communication with Soaring Peaks Middle School principal, November 1996).

3. The high mountain climate presented health concerns. There can be snow any day of the year in Soaring Peaks County, and temperatures can drop well below freezing at any hour of any day. Culturally and practically speaking, many immigrant Latino families were not prepared to deal with the cold weather. (See Associated Press article, "Illegal aliens dying of exposure in the mountains," February 12, 1997, ***Summit Daily***.)

4. Student learning of subject matter is inhibited, especially at the secondary level, if there is a language barrier. In Soaring Peaks School District, 99% of the ESL students were speakers of Spanish. As explained by the Soaring Peaks High School Sheltered English instructor, programs existed in the schools, but many times the students in the special language classes did not attain the depth of knowledge they could have gained had they studied the subjects in their own language [Spanish].

Rehearsing the Song

In the summer of 1994, Dr. Edwards, Superintendent of Soaring Peaks District, moved to Soaring Peaks' mountain community from a Front Range school district near Denver. According to Dr. Edwards, Soaring Peaks had a "more human scale," and to him this was the key to establishing good communication. "I can stay in touch with people in the schools, and there's great diversity among the students and parents in Soaring Peaks County. I enjoy diversity..."

Nevertheless, some community members in the district thought that parents and the school administrators communicated poorly. Comments made a Latino parent of a middle school student reflect a feeling for the tacit voices in the community.

> What about parents who are not as aggressive as me [about getting information from school about what might be going on with her daughter]? They may have many issues for not being involved, but that doesn't always mean they don't want to be. Normally each school [in the district] has someone assigned to the school to translate. The language barrier can be another thing. I bet many of the parents want to be involved but they are scared to because they might not be understood.

A perceived *lack* of communication reached into the schools and classrooms as well . The Latino parent of one high school senior shared the following concern:

> This one teacher told me these non-English-speaking kids are thrown into his classes and classes with teachers who cannot work with them. The teacher thought they [the limited English-speaking students] should work together [in an isolated group] until they have the language skills. The school needs to accommodate these kids. They are so intelligent, and the teachers don't know what to do.

Another bilingual, bicultural Latina parent who lived in the county all of her life made reference to the stereotyping she felt existed in the district.

> The [Soaring Peaks] school system likes to call everyone Anglo or Mexican. If you appear to be Latino, they assume you are Spanish-speaking or if you don't [speak Spanish], they assume you should not be eligible for ESL and that you'll fit into the regular school. But what if you don't fit with the culture of the light skinned people? You walk into any school [in Soaring Peaks District] and those differences are there.

At the time of this study, many of the Latinos who lived and worked and went to school in Soaring Peaks County were legal visitors or U.S. citizens. However, if the pattern mentioned by Jones in her ***High Country News*** article was correct, and if the claims of Soaring Peaks School District teachers and administrators were correct, many of the Latinos were not legally in the US. The spouse of one Soaring Peaks' elementary school teacher observed that many Latino parents were afraid to voice concerns or to participate in the decision-making process of the schools because they were undocumented aliens.

> There are many of them operating at the survival level. They live with their families and others, as many as 12-15 in one trailer. Send a student home to be in a mobile home with 13-14 others and what can be expected? For many, the move from Mexico was a financial decision. The family is first for many of these [new immigrants]. Education may not be the priority for many of these parents.

From 1992-1997, the number of "second language acquisition" (SLA) students grew markedly in Soaring Peaks School District. As reported in a November 1996 memo from the district's Second Language Acquisition Coordinator to the Board and the Superintendent, in 1992-93 school year the total number of SLA students was 190. It increased to 245 in 1993-94, then to 330 in 1994-95. By 1995-96 the number had increased to 440, and it was up to 499 in the 1996-97 school year.

Even though most of the SLA students were Spanish-speaking, this did not mean they naturally united with the local Latino community in Soaring Peaks County. On the contrary, there were noticeable tensions between the different groups of Latinos. The stigma given to the Spanish-speaking newcomers was that they posed job threats to the local Latinos because they were willing to work for less money and for fewer benefits. Dr. Edwards acknowledged this and further commented that the tension spread beyond the different Latino groups.

> While they all may be Hispanic, there are cultural differences. They [the longer-term, local Latinos] focus on those. There are economic reasons...The tension is increasing and it often gets focused on resources. 'I'm not getting my fair share of the resources, and I'm irritated.' Some of our Anglo kids and Anglo parents believe that. Having these non-English-speaking kids in my son or daughter's classroom causes my kid to be deprived of resources that would otherwise be used for him or her. Some of the long-term Hispanic residents will say, 'Why are you devoting the time and the resources to teach the kids English who can't speak English? That's taking away from my kid's education.'

Finding the Beat

Soaring Peaks School District, like most districts in the state during the timeframe of this study, was dynamic and changing. The high percentage of transients—both teachers and students—was directly related to the district's relationship with Misty Mountain Resort. When the ski area would opened in November, there would be a surge in student enrollment. When the area would close in May, students would be pulled out of school before the end of the academic year. The superintendent made reference to this district-wide concern:

> One of the factors working against us in the district is the transience, mobility of the population. Just as with our teachers. In any given school, we can have up to 30% of our kids start and not finish [because they have transferred out of or just left the area]...

In resort areas like Soaring Peaks, where so many students and families move in and out, *newcomers* become *locals* at different rates and in different ways. The White. Euro-American residents who had been in the area for only two or three years tended to become *local* more quickly than Latinos. The Latinos—especially those who did not speak English and who were usually less affluent—were not part of the dominant culture group. Nevertheless, they were members of the community with concerns about education.

Diversity in the district was socioeconomic and cultural as well as ethnic. Dr. Edwards alluded to this in the following anecdote:

> One day two years ago, I started my day with a business/education partnership meeting, and the leaders of Misty Mountain Ski Resort were there, including the president. I ended my day with a meeting [in a small hamlet] up the river a ways. They called me earlier in the afternoon and said, 'You might want to go to the bathroom before you come out here because we don't have any indoor plumbing in our community center.' That is both ends of the world out here. From a morning of dealing with a real cosmopolitan, world-wide organization, to the afternoon where it's very very local.

Diversity in its many forms made it challenging for the district's learning community to reach consensus. The school district's budget, facilities, student discipline, and curriculum, graduation requirements, the "Hispanic learning gap," the lack of affordable housing for district employees, the increasing number of students on free and reduced lunch, and the locations for bus stops all required the district's time, attention, and money. Yet while attending to these concerns, Soaring Peaks District was expected to act on the state's mandate to develop district content standards.

Before Dr. Edwards began his work as the district's superintendent in June 1994, the composition of the learning community was in a state of flux. The central administration was in turmoil from 1992 to 1994--the superintendent; the director of curriculum, instruction, and professional development; and the assistant superintendent were all replaced. The composition of the Board of Education changed with each election (if not sooner), many of the teachers early in their careers and/or new to the district were unsettled and were prone to move, and many of the students were transient. These factors kept the district's attempt to establish a knowledge base off beat.

Because instability was the norm in the district, Dr. Edwards was adamant about the need to work with curriculum and not with standards. "We are constantly bringing people in," he insisted, and

> ...with people early in their careers, you need stuff for them to work with. Materials are more important in Soaring Peaks County than in most places because of those young teachers. To expect that they are going to go out and find their own or develop their own materials is just not the way the world works. To implement [a geography curriculum] the first thing you need are materials and good materials that match the curriculum. The alignment of the written curriculum, the taught curriculum, and the tested curriculum is extraordinarily important in a place like Soaring Peaks County...

As noted by Dr. Edwards, "sometimes, when issues in a school district are complex and when instability more than stability characterizes the situation, citizens and Board of Education members seek simple, concrete solutions." In Soaring Peaks, with all of the social and economic tension that was brewing within and among different groups, with a racially-defined learning "gap," and an ever-increasing student population, a local group called Citizens for Educational Quality decided that the district should adopt Core Knowledge Curriculum. As Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Staff Development, Dr. Richards acknowledged that, "when you've got criticism about the content, relevance, and rigor of the curriculum, when your standardized test scores are declining, you'd better do something about it." Dr. Edwards echoed her declaration:

> There was a lot of community interest and a lot of community energy that was [sic] focused around the rigor of our curriculum. There was a lot of criticism about the rigor of our curriculum and the quality of education that we were providing students as evidenced in test scores.

Instead of embracing the Core Knowledge Curriculum developed by E.D. Hirsch, the district administrators and the Board of Education decided to write rigorous curriculum guides for the district. The guides were supposed to be content specific and were supposed to meet the demands of the state's standards-based legislation.

The demand for a Core Knowledge Curriculum from the Citizens for Educational Quality had stimulated dialogue about curriculum revision and development in the

district, and the administrators made the decision to "fast track" the curriculum change process. Dr. Richards indicated:

> He [Dr. Edwards] moved into a pretty intense curriculum review process...He involved me...in the process of setting together four content curriculum study areas as curriculum teams. These teams were to review drafts of the state standards, to review our present curriculum, and to make major revisions. This work began in 1994. In the core content areas, in social studies, we had an elementary and a secondary curriculum leader...They attended conferences, studied what other districts were doing, did some road trips, and reviewed many, many materials...Social Studies was the last to come on line, the last one we presented to the Board...Geography and history [curricula] were adopted by the Board of Education in May of 1996.

Name that Tune: Is a Voluntary Mandate an Oxymoron?

Dr. Edwards was quick to point out that district's curriculum writing and alignment to the standards would be an ongoing process that had to be "revisited" often. He felt that in order to have a more democratic process with curriculum development, it all needed to "get out in front of the people. The district [needed] to help parents understand what was being taught and how it was being taught and to engage them [the parents] in the discussion."

In a Board of Education Meeting, September 28, 1994, Dr. Edwards advised the members that the district was advertising via school newsletters, a press release, and local radio ads for parent participants to serve on curriculum writing teams. Dr. Edwards stated that the curriculum work teams should include teachers, principals, parents, and students, and he also noted that "achieving like mind would not be easy." When asked if any students had been involved in the district's standards writing process, responses from interviewees indicated that there was confusion around the issue of who should write the district's standards and curriculum. One middle school teacher said she doubted that "any students were invited [to participate in the writing] and that probably the only parents there were teachers in the district who were parents."

A Latina parent reported that although the school district surveyed parents, she felt isolated and not included.

> I'd say my ideas don't get brought into the decisions about what should be taught in school...I don't remember ever getting asked what I think my child should learn, or whether I think geometry or another math should be required...For the Spanish-speaking students and the parents who have come from Mexico and other places, they come into the US trusting the schools.

As acknowledged by Dr. Edwards,

> The ideal [situation for change] would have been a community–wide discussion which would provide a forum for dialogue concerning the upgraded curriculum content and what would be taught. It could have resulted in finding out that we do not have a 'like mind' either within the school community or from the extended community.

Establishing the Melody for Geography

Everything happens in a certain location and in a certain place. Because geography includes the study of locations and places, most US citizens assume that geography is included somewhere in the K-12 curriculum. Historically, however, in Soaring Peaks School District and in districts and classrooms across the country, this has not been the case. (See Palmer-Moloney 1998, 76-86.) Driven by the state's standards reform mandate, the superintendent and the Soaring Peaks Board of Education decided to support the development of a K-12 geography program to be included as part of the district's social studies curriculum.

Fortunately for Soaring Peaks School District, many of the key teachers involved in geography curriculum writing at the district level were also trained in "academic" geography and/or geographic education. "Geography is really part of the whole social

studies curriculum," explained Dr. Burton, principal of Mountain View Middle School in Soaring Peaks District. He continued:

> Geography is a study of the world and the environment....There's the whole area of social studies—history, civics, economics—and there's geography. It's hard to meet everything, to do it all and have enough time. You have to make decisions about what gets more preference, even within geography. What parts of geography are the most important? The countries? The maps? All of those things need time, and time is the resource that determines what will get taught. It all comes down to time.

"Nobody asked me if geography was important when they were writing the national standards, but you know it's part of the core curriculum that all students need to know to be successful. It's part of being an American," said Dr. Richards. She continued:

> A student needs to know how to read, write, work science, to do math equations, and to know where in the world everything is. I think especially since the world has become less separate, we are becoming more and more one global society....Cultural relations are imbedded in the geography curriculum. It helps us raise awareness about differences among cultures and groups and where they live and why they are the way they are....

One bilingual Latino parent commented:

> To me with my kids, just knowing about big rivers and volcanoes gets you out of your own little world. They need to know that there is more in the world out there. They need to broaden their perspectives. I don't know. I guess I've been wrong, but I always figured that this [geography] was already taught in school as part of social studies.

Curriculum? Standards? "Let's call the whole thing off..."

Though many district level curriculum specialists and curricularists in higher education may claim there is a distinction between content standards and curriculum, their claim does not constitute a universal truth. As noted in the minutes of September 13, 1994, Dr. Edwards asked the Board of Education members the question, "What is the curriculum?" No definitive answer was recorded. However, Dr. Edwards did mention that the debate was age old. Further into the discussion, the district's assistant superintendent commented:

> ...The curriculum is the 'what,' the instruction is the 'how,' and that is where building latitude and site decisions can enter. The curriculum is what the buildings have in common. The strategies of how to get student there, how teachers take students there could look quite different.

At the October 12, 1994 Board of Education meeting, the minutes document Dr. Edwards' vision for the district's curriculum writing process.

> We want the work to result in a Core Curriculum [not to be confused with E.D. Hirsch's work], we want there to be a focus on content; we want to specify content in all areas (reading, writing, math, science, history, and geography). We want to specify high standards for each content area at each grade level. We want to work to result in alignment of our written curriculum, taught curriculum, learned curriculum, and tested curriculum.

"The standards are the goal. They direct what we are going to look at for materials in the area of geography," said Dr. Burton. "The standards probably direct the geography resource companies to develop products to help support the standards....The standards drive curriculum and help determine at what levels you are teaching the goals."

Dr. Edwards had been involved in many discussions and arguments related to curriculum over the years, and he recounted that most arguments about curriculum were because of differences in philosophy and differences in beliefs about what out to drive the curriculum. He expressed his beliefs to the Board of Education at a meeting on August 24, 1994. According to Board minutes,

> He [Dr. Edwards] discussed the District's intent to fast track upgrading of the curriculum and plans to have at least a first draft form of the upgrade by January, 1995. He discussed the rationale and driving force behind doing this work, including H.B. 1313. He said the District intended to do work, which would exceed the state's requirements in terms of specification of content, and the levels at which standards were specified. He said there was a felt and spoken need to have all of the District's curriculum exist in a similar format which would identify specific content standards, match and exceed the requirements of H.B. 1313, and make the District's curriculum more user-friendly for teachers. He said there was also a felt need to be very clear about the content of the District's curriculum in each curriculum area. He felt there was already much curriculum work done in the District and that the ongoing work was not a start from scratch. In some cases some of the curriculum would only need to be reformatted to make it more usable....He advised that the curriculum committees would present a written plan and series of recommendations to the Board in September, 1994. He said the curriculum committee positions for parents would be advertised throughout the District. Applications would ask for expertise, interest, and availability levels of responding parents. He said they also intended to add

students to the curriculum committees. Additionally, [Dr. Edwards] advised of the intention to have principals playing key roles on the curriculum committees.

At the following Board of Education meeting on September 13, 1994, Dr. Edwards continued to share information about H.B. 93-1313 and Soaring Peaks School District's response to the state mandate. From the minutes of the meeting, his belief that Soaring Peaks School District was going above and beyond the state requirements is evident:

> Dr. Edwards said the Governor was giving speeches and sending strong messages about the need to be very specific about content. Dr. Edwards felt that [SPSD] had not arrived at a 'like mind' about what that meant, nor had a like mind been arrived at in the state. He felt, that for some people, specifying the content meant specifying the material from beginning to end for each and every course, for each and every unit in that course, and for each and every day in each and every unit in that course. It did not mean that for him [Dr. Edwards]. He felt content specified to that degree removed the kind of teacher decision-making that he wanted to see occur; the kind of teacher decision-making that took into account the students and their needs, the curriculum that was required, and the setting or the situation in which we were operating. Dr. Edwards said that to him, specifying content did start with standards and required that we have identified and approved materials that ere available for use in schools.

When one member of the Board asked the meaning of "curriculum content," the assistant superintendent responded that it was what students were to learn. "That was the intent behind H.B. 93-1313." The minutes record that the assistant superintendent felt Soaring Peaks School District used to write curriculum from a coverage perspective. "It was assumed that because teachers taught it, students learned it." Then the records indicate the superintendent felt Soaring Peaks School District needed to align the written curriculum, the taught curriculum, the learned curriculum, and the assessed curriculum. "He felt we had a need to move as quickly as we could to the point where we could make definitive statements about what our students knew and could do in each of the curriculum areas."

Later, reflecting on changes in the district, Dr. Edwards reaffirmed his position:

> I don't differentiate [between the standards and curriculum for geography]. They are not separated. Within the curriculum, the standards are imbedded. If you pulled out the geography curriculum, you'll see the standards imbedded in there....We did curriculum work, we didn't do standards work. That's a semantic difference, but it sent a signal that we are tending to content and the materials. We are not just going to do standards work and flip the standards out there and believe that teachers are going to use their professional expertise [to teach to the standards], which many could. We have many beginning teachers here, so we clearly did curriculum work....We used those [the state model content standards] as a guide, but our work was on curriculum....Through curriculum work we addressed the standards. The reason we did it that way was because we wanted to assure that we were attending to content. Too often standards work will produce a nice set of standards, but in terms of content that teachers are actually going to work with, there is much left to decide....We attended to the state standards...as we were developing a core content curriculum.

In Soaring Peaks School District, the overload of standards in social studies was evident. "We are working on a social studies curriculum that strives to incorporate all of the required content areas, but right now only two areas have been approved by the state—geography and history." Dr. Richards further commented:

> The second tier [civics/government, and economics] are [sic] still in draft form, with major revisions yet to come. At this point, we are keeping them separate. We need to help teachers draw the connections [between subject areas]....We love the rigor of the standards. We love that and to hold all students accountable for reaching high standards. In the process of having content rich curriculum, we run into problems...of having too much. How can we do it all?...Our teachers have been incredible. They are very innovative. They have not been hard to move into the standards movement at all. In fact, when we started this curriculum effort, the teachers said, "Thank you. It's about time.' Our curriculum had been so process oriented that nobody even knew what they were supposed to teach....You couple that with Soaring Peaks' turn-over rate and the number of young and new teachers in the district. People like me are not in the majority. [Dr. Richards has worked in Soaring Peaks School District for over 20 years!] The majority of our staff is in the first three years of teaching. It's setting them up for failure to give them a curriculum that's process oriented and doesn't tell them what they have to teach....This whole standards movement and our curriculum writing have helped us clear up what it is that's taught at which grade.

At the Board of Education meeting on January 24, 1996, Dr. Edwards handed out the document, *Higher Expectations, Better Results: The Basics on Colorado's Standards-based Education.* As found in the Board minutes, Dr. Edwards advised the members that:

> The document produced by the Colorado Education Association was a good overview of standards-based education in the state and the laws governing it. He [Dr. Edwards] called attention to the fact that school districts were required to develop their own content standards which met or exceeded the state standards by January, 1997, in Language Arts, Math, Social Studies (history, geography, and civics), and science. Dr. Edwards said that SPSD [Soaring Peaks School District] was 'out in front' in this activity; SPSD's 'impetus' was a 'little different than the state standards.' He said most school districts would be doing this work because of the state law and the state requirement. SPSD had started with a focus on its curriculum and the need to upgrade it in the basic areas, being clear about 'what students should know and be able to do.' Dr. Edwards said that effort resulted in meeting the requirements of the state law. He emphasized that he was sharing the above referenced document because he felt that it contained a good description, a concise description that actually included the thrust of the state standards.

A curriculum team for social studies was established. On the team were five high school social studies teachers, two middle school teachers, one administrator (from the middle school level who had also taught elementary school), seven elementary school teachers, and four parents. Dr. Richards tried to recruit one person from each grade level for curriculum writing.

Addressing the Board of Education, Dr. Edwards said:

> When we do curriculum work, we need teachers involved in the development process....To believe that we were going to end up with a good result without involving teachers, parents, and principals in every step of the process was irresponsible thinking. It was only common sense that when people were asked to implement a program that they needed to be involved in the development of that program.

Parent representation on the geography curriculum team was harder to muster than teacher representation; Dr. Edwards was aware of this. "Getting the community involved was important. Not a huge number of parents were involved. [Even if they chose not to participate], it was important to let them know that we wanted their input." The parents on the writing team for geography were picked by suggestions and recommendations from the teachers," Dr. Burton conceded. "They were recruited, in a sense."

The process took a long time because the state took a long time. According to Dr. Burton, "We came up with the rough draft and always tried to modify to stay up with the state's rough drafts." (Burton said that he had attended some standards writing conferences on social studies and geography that were provided by the state.)

To summarize their work to date, the Social Studies Curriculum Team reported to the Board of Education on January 25, 1995. Board of Education minutes show that the Curriculum Team:

> ...had discovered that the whole theory of standards was life saving. Part of the problem that they discovered over the last year or two was that there were major holes in the curriculum and that there was not enough content rich curriculum. The standards had motivated them and empowered them to do what was needed [to improve their programs]....[The Curriculum Team] divided up the standards and plugged them into their program....Social Studies teachers [at the high school level] tended to be content specialists, but it was felt that the middle school [teachers] needed a basic text....[The Curriculum Team] attended a convention where there were 300 tables of different textbooks and supplementary materials and as a result, they obviously have a lot of choices for selecting good instructional materials....

The Performance

"The curriculum process should help teachers know what to teach and what is expected," but Dr. Edwards reported, "the curriculum needed to leave teachers the freedom to pull in their expertise and experience. Some teachers have developed lessons that work, and they should be able to use them." Dr. Richards noted that she believed it was part of her job to help teachers make the implementation process more manageable. "I have to help [teachers] do this because right now it seems like it is not [manageable]. Like developing units of study. Like having materials that the teachers need to be able to teach [the new curriculum]."

Many people were responsible for helping teachers teach to the new curriculum and to the new geography standards. Dr. Richards and Dr. Edwards felt that they, as the

central office administrators, were responsible for knowing the relationships between the new curriculum and the standards if the standards were to be implemented through the new curriculum. The central office administrators were supposed to direct the building principals, who were the ones best positioned to monitor the implementation process at work in the classrooms. Principals and curriculum team leaders were to evaluate the process and to report back to the central office.

"Curriculum is what you do," said Dr. Richards, "and the standards are your goal. The curriculum is how you make that come alive and the steps you go through to reach that goal." A comparison of the *Colorado Model Content Standards for Geography* and the *Soaring Peaks School District Geography Curriculum* (May 1996) revealed the following: (1) There is a scope and sequence curriculum chart for K-5 geography with specific examples of what to teach aligned to the standards. (2) There is an outline of a regional, thematic geography aligned to the state model content standards for grades 9-12. (3) There is no new "curriculum" given for middle school, grades 6-8. At the middle school level, there are few, if any, changes between the state's model content standards for geography and the Soaring Peaks School District geography curriculum. (See Figure 1.)

In the district's *Geography Curriculum* guidebook, specific regions for study were noted in the Appendix of the K-5 Objectives. "The Geography Scope & Sequence for K-5" at the back of the guidebook listed each standard, each key idea, and each grade-level objective once more. On the Scope & Sequence chart, grade levels were listed across from each Standard, Key Idea/Skill, and Expectation. At each level either a blank (meaning "not covered") was given or an "I" meaning "concept introduced," or a "A"

meaning "concept applied," or an "M" meaning "concept mastered," or an "R" meaning "concept reviewed."

In Appendix C, the Geography Content for grades 9-12 was given. Presented as a regional approach for two semesters of study, regions and thematic issues (such as physical geography, cultural geography/population patterns, and contemporary issues in the region) were aligned to the state's model content standards for geography.

However, no additional information was provided to make the district's curriculum for geography in grades 6-8 any more "content rich" than the state model content standards themselves. No more direction was given in this curriculum guide than in the state model geography content standards. In the Soaring Peaks School District's *Geography Curriculum* guidebook, key ideas/skills/outcomes for each of the Standards had associated grade-level expectations. These key ideas/skills/outcomes and associated grade-level expectations were summarized once more in Appendix A, "K-12 Objectives." As demonstrated in this Appendix, the grades 6-8 objectives were simply the expectations presented yet again. These expectations were not augmented to include regions or topics for study. They were merely distributed between grades 6, 7, and 8, and in many cases, were duplicated in all three grades.

A new 6-8 grade middle school teacher coming into Soaring Peaks School District would have to rely on texts, instructional materials produced by textbook publishers, help from other teachers, or her/his own geography background to develop curriculum and instruction methods for social studies/geography. The district's *Geography Curriculum* guide would provide the new middle school social studies teacher with no specific curricular or instructional assistance.

The curriculum writing team determined that the sixth grade social studies curriculum would be focused on world history and world regions. To accommodate this curriculum, the district's social studies curriculum writing team decided on the MacMillan publisher's ***World Adventures in Time and Place***, edited by James Banks for the sixth grade social studies text. The fact that no specific content rich curriculum for instructional purposes was included in the district's curriculum document did not cause problems, for the textbook was set up to "meet" the new geography standards.

The seventh grade teachers decided to use the Glencoe publisher's text titled ***Geography: The World and Its People***, as one of their primary resources. This text was written to meet the national geography standards. It came with a teacher resource packet, along with Spanish audiocassettes, a Spanish resource binder, and a computer software testbank disk. Other materials purchased by the district to support the geography curriculum in the middle grades included: one set of 30 hardback ***Goode's World Atlas*** (19th edition) per social studies classroom; one set of 4 pull-down maps (the World, the Eastern Hemisphere, the Western Hemisphere, and the United States); and one globe per room. Technology was provided to enhance the curriculum, too. Each classroom had access to videodiscs and a videodisc player; a VCR player and TV monitor; an overhead projector; and at least one computer and printer. With the assistance of pre-generated teaching material and audio visual support—not the district's *Geography Curriculum* guide—a new middle school teacher in Soaring Peaks School District would be able to determine what to teach.

Taking the Coda: Associations with Parents for Partnerships and Possibilities

One recurrent goal of Soaring Peaks School District was to incorporate and include more of the parents' perspectives and goals for education. In order to meet the standards-based education state mandate and the governor's call for "bottom-up" reform, this component was crucial. Dr. Edwards noted the importance of this task:

> It's our goal [as the SPSD Administrative Team] to hear parents at every opportunity. Not just in the formal meetings, but in every conversation, every meeting, every encounter out in the parking lot and at the grocery store. We are doing a better job of this. We have to tell the story of what we are doing again and again in as many places as we can.

He goes on to say that "parent voices are the most pronounced and the loudest when they aren't being heard." Most of the Latino parents' issues and concerns in Soaring Peaks District, however, did not seem to be voiced. Those Latino parents who were "locals" with longer-term interests in the school district were not part of the county's dominant culture group. For this reason, they did not have the strongest voices as part of Soaring Peaks School District's learning community. The newcomers, those Latino parents who were new to the district, and in many cases new to the United States, had even quieter voices if their voices were heard at all. One Latino parent commented:

> Because of the language barrier, many times these [Latino] parents are not included. The teachers and the schools need to seek them out. They [the Latino parents] need to feel accepted and comfortable. They want to share about who they are and where they've come from, but they don't know how to do it....

Conclusions and Thematic Generalizations

The option to omit geography as a content standard was not offered to Soaring Peaks School District. Therefore, the writing of geography curriculum/standards did not necessarily reflect the community's values and beliefs about what was important in education. The "freedom" to decide what all students should know and be able to do had

been determined by the state, and it was within the confines of those content areas deemed worthy that the district had to respond. This restraint contradicted the claim that standards-based education in Colorado was "bottom-up;" in essence the state's educational values, not the local community values, were considered .

According to H.B. 1313, local district implementation of the content standards for geography, mathematics, science, reading and writing, and history was to be in place by January 1997. Soaring Peaks School District was faced with a number of issues that superseded its standards-adoption work at the same time it was faced with this mandate from the state. In the 1996-97 academic year, Soaring Peaks District had (1) a high percentage of new teachers, (2) a high rate of teacher turnover, (3) a rapidly growing student population, (4) a high percentage of transient students, and (5) an increasing number of limited English proficiency students, particularly Spanish speaking Latinos.

In those places where standards-based reform has gone beyond rhetoric, there is the realization that "success" requires long-term investment, informed leadership, and a great deal of persistence. Soaring Peaks School District had hundreds of urgent and important issues to juggle, and the geography content standards represented one small ball in the act. If that ball would have fallen, not many would have noticed as long as other, bigger, more significant balls were kept in the air.

Due to the district's unique circumstances and exigencies, the standards writing and adoption process was linked directly to the curriculum writing and adoption process. Whether it was realized officially or not, when Soaring Peaks School District made the decision to adopt its *Geography Curriculum*, it adopted the state model geography content standards, too.

In Soaring Peaks School District, the parent participation in the curriculum/standards writing process was largely symbolic. The actual influence of parents on decisions was limited to those who had been chosen by the Board of Education and who had the time to participate. This select cadre of parents along with the education professionals from the school district controlled the flow of information and the decisions made about the geography curriculum.

Many Latino parents who were new to the district had reasons other than lack of interest for not participating in the district's decision –making process. Many of these parents lacked basic transportation to move around the vast expanse of the county to attend meetings. Many of them worked two or three jobs and could not commit the time required to play an active role in "bottom-up" reform efforts. Often educators from the district traveled out to conference with and connect with these Latino parents instead of asking them to come to the schools. Once a month there was a Latino parent outreach at the largest of the county's trailer courts. "The turn-out there is better than at the parent conferences," one teacher commented. She recommended "that the schools have compassion for these people. They have made tremendous sacrifices for their families; schools should make some sacrifices for them."

Because a significant number of voices in Soaring Peaks School District were silent in the curriculum/standards writing song, defining the community's educational values was a challenge at the time of this study. In Soaring Peaks, including all voices will continue to be a constant, dynamic challenge, for the community in all of its guises is constantly changing. Curricula and standards that reflect the district's diverse community

of learners will require a flexible environment where modification to the curriculum and standards is expected and encouraged.

Solutions to the problems associated with truly implementing "bottom-up" reform are difficult to find. The analysis of Soaring Peaks School District presented in this study reveals the presence of many voices in the local community of learners and demonstrates the absence of some voices from the school reform process. Administrators in Soaring Peaks School District did not seem to be unaware or intentionally insensitive to the plight of the Latino parents. However, failure to include these parents, to hear their part in the song, was rooted in issues of power and control established as status quo by the dominant culture group in the county.

The potential for enriching the geography curriculum is greater with the inclusion of other voices. Hopefully the curriculum will be implemented in such a way as to take advantage of the Latino parents as a resource in Soaring Peaks School District. As the mother of one middle schooler stated:

> Geography could provide enrichment. I have always been a firm believer in these Spanish-speaking parents, that they could provide their experiences and their trades in the classes. I think they want to be productive and helpful.

Nevertheless, whether the Latino parent voices were heard or not, community discontent seemed to be stifled as changes to the curricula were made. Dr. Richards, a key to unraveling the issues in Soaring Peaks School District, put it succinctly:

> Finally, now we have things in alignment. People in the community [and on the Board of Education] agree with one another. We are all of sudden very cohesive. We are ready to really move forward. Before there were questions about leadership. Besides the curriculum, the Citizens for Educational Quality had problems, too. For most of the parents now, things finally seem OK.

True "bottom-up" reform can only occur if the Soaring Peaks School District were to extend its learning community to include those parent voices that were not be

heard. There is great potential in incorporating everyone, though it will take a lot of creative effort on the part of the school system. Regardless of the effort needed, opening lines of communication may benefit the county, as a whole. One Latino parent concluded our interview with the following idea, which emphasizes the importance of including all voices, if and when possible:

> Let me say one more thing. The more we know about one another, the less scary and the more interesting it all becomes.

Nota Bene:

Having voted standards-based education into law as H. B. 93-1313, the Colorado Legislature had to face the full financial implications of standards-based education—especially the fiscal impact of the implementation of the standards and the mandated assessments. Although the first priority state model content standards for reading, writing, mathematics, science, history, and geography remained in the legislation, by March 1997 the geography and history assessment requirements had been removed from the law (C.R.S. 22-7-409). As eulogized by a prominent geographer at the University of Colorado at Boulder, the state model content standards for geography were a good idea, and they filled an important need. "But," he said, "what's not tested is not taught." The future of geography in Colorado social studies classrooms remains to be seen.

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